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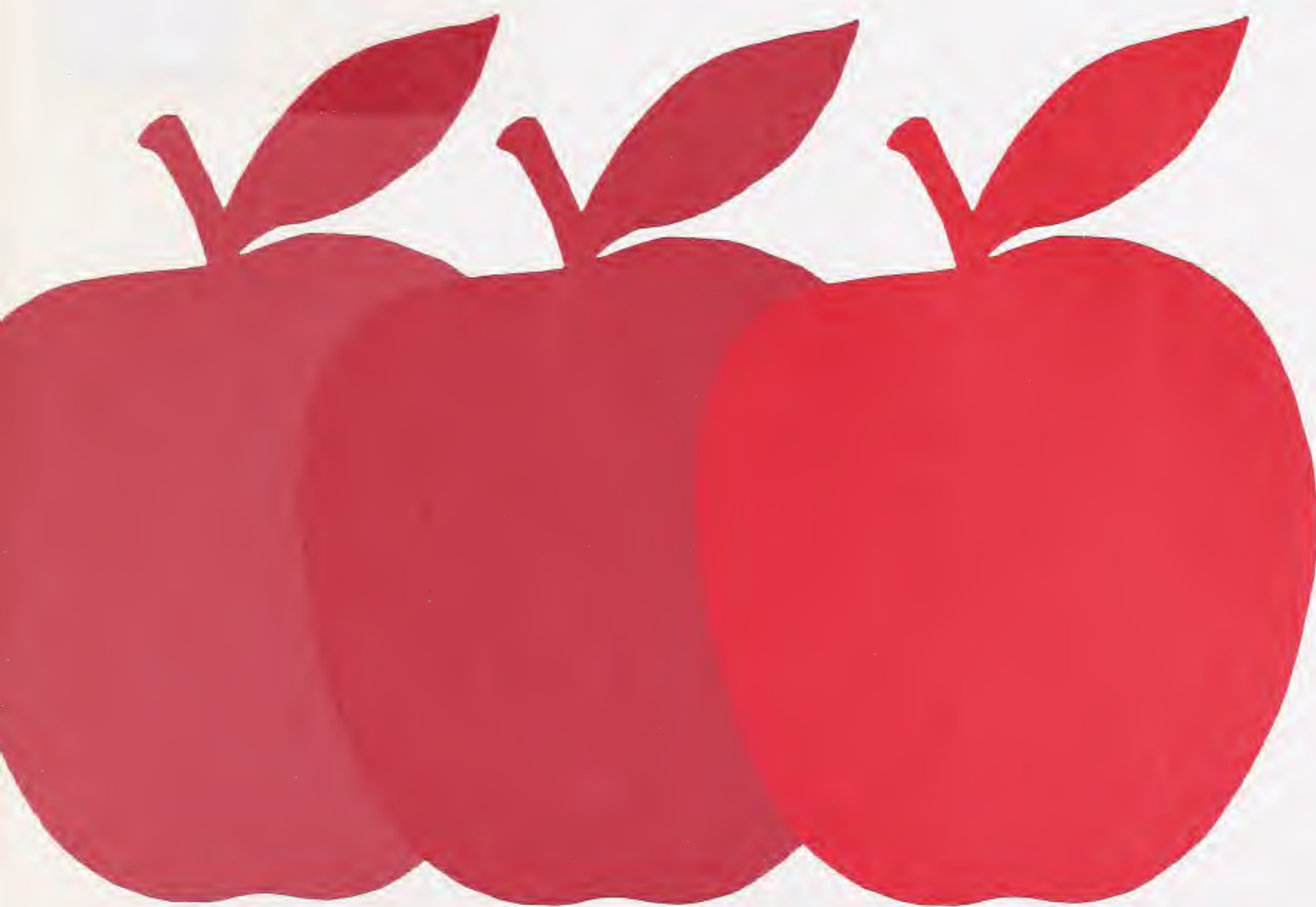


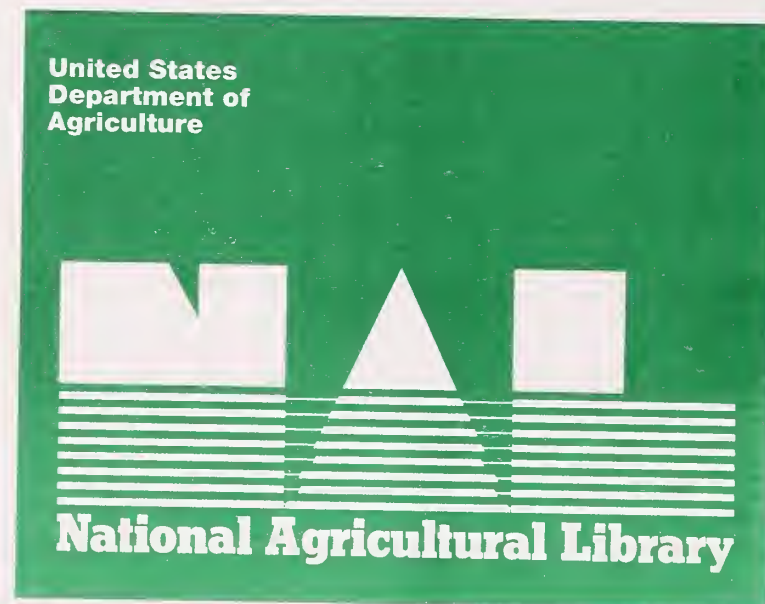
September 1994

# **Shaping Our Future:**

## **A Strategic Plan for Nutrition, Diet and Health**

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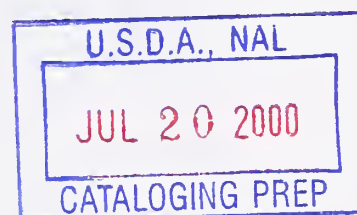
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# Shaping Our Future:

## A Strategic Plan for Nutrition, Diet and Health







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## Foreword

As the 21st century nears, Extension faces major challenges in the areas of nutrition, diet, and health education. These challenges, many of which are interrelated, must become national and international priorities.

In an era of national debate on health care costs and how best to contain them, it is paramount that research and education focus on the essential role of nutrition, diet, and optimal health habits in preventing costly and debilitating illness. Helping communities manage their resources to promote health and supporting people in the practice of healthful lifestyles are important to individual, family, and community well-being. Finding ways to ensure access to a safe and adequate food supply for all remains of deep concern, as does ensuring the responsiveness of the agricultural system to the health needs of the population.

*Shaping Our Future: A Strategic Plan for Nutrition, Diet and Health* builds on Extension's traditional strengths in nutrition, diet, and health, including the coordination of communities' needs, university-based research, and educational expertise. The plan is also visionary in program design and delivery, addressing such issues as domestic and international public policy; agricultural food production, processing, and distribution; and international health.

The agenda for nutrition, diet, and health education outlined in this plan is ambitious. It demands the best that Extension professionals and volunteers can give. But the personal, societal, and economic rewards to be gained by promoting human health and wellness make the effort not only worthwhile but imperative.



Connie McKenna  
Acting Deputy Administrator  
Home Economics and Human Nutrition  
Extension Service  
U. S. Department of Agriculture

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## Preface

*Shaping Our Future: A Strategic Plan for Nutrition, Diet and Health* proposes a national vision reflecting not only nutrition, diet, and health issues but the myriad connections among them. To realize this vision, the plan features a variety of conceptual and organizing tools, including goals, objectives, situation statements, and action and implementation plans.

The process by which the strategic plan was developed began with the appointment of a Strategic Planning Team composed of Extension professionals, including federal partners at the USDA Extension Service and state Cooperative Extension partners. An initial meeting of the team was followed by further communication and consultation among team members in order to develop goals, objectives, situation statements, and action and implementation plans. Regional input was also solicited, including formal and informal review of the draft materials by diverse individuals representing consumers, agriculture, family and consumer sciences, industry, hunger prevention and health advocacy groups, the health care community, and other groups. The team produced a draft strategic plan incorporating this input at a two-day meeting held in Washington, DC, in August 1993.

The draft plan was then reviewed by the Strategic Planning Council and the Program Leadership Committee of the USDA Extension Service. The plan was also reviewed by nutrition, diet, and health education professionals in Extension and in the private sector, resulting in the incorporation of comments from a total of 184 individuals—representing 50 land-grant institutions, the USDA Extension Service, and three outside organizations—in the final document.

*Shaping Our Future* will guide the USDA Nutrition, Diet and Health Base Program in the coming years. It is also highly recommended as a model for county, state, regional, and territorial groups engaging in strategic planning in this important and exciting area.



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# Acknowledgments

The efforts of the individuals listed below are acknowledged in the preparation of *Shaping Our Future*.

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## Overview

The Nutrition, Diet and Health (NDH) Base Program is one of seven Base Programs of the Cooperative Extension System (CES) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The programs, which involve many discipline-based and multidisciplinary efforts, represent the ongoing priority program activities of CES. They are central to the CES mission and common to most Extension units. In addition, they receive significant resources throughout the System at the county, state, regional, and national levels and in the U.S. territories.

The seven CES educational Base Programs are:

- Agriculture
- Community Resources and Economic Development
- Family Development and Resource Management
- 4-H and Youth Development
- Leadership and Volunteer Development
- Natural Resources and Environmental Management
- Nutrition, Diet and Health

CES is uniquely suited to the effective delivery of nutrition, diet, and health education programs. It links the educational and research resources and activities of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 74 land-grant universities, and 3,150 county administrative units throughout the United States and its territories. This publicly funded, nonformal educational system maintains a professional staff and faculty with competence in nutrition, diet, and health at USDA, in territories and regions, in every state, and in most counties.

### CES Mission and Values

CES furthers public well-being by helping meet societal needs for an educated citizenry (see box). In addition, the System strives to ensure equity and equal access to all of its programs, with recognition of and respect for diversity. By linking an estab-

#### **CES Mission**

*The Cooperative Extension System helps people improve their lives through an educational process that uses scientific information to address issues and needs.*



lished nonformal education system with a valid research base, CES is uniquely positioned to help put knowledge to work in the community.

CES educators value a number of approaches to education, including:

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*CES is uniquely positioned to help put knowledge to work in the community.*

- A comprehensive approach to societal issues.
- Anticipatory, flexible, and timely educational programs that address local situations and needs.
- Individual and organizational integrity in the pursuit of educational excellence.
- Research-based educational methodologies that meet the needs of diverse audiences.
- Inclusivity, with recognition of and mutual respect for human differences, values, and beliefs.
- Formation of alliances, collaborations, coalitions, partnerships, and networks that create synergistic outcomes for the people served.
- Sensitivity to the environment.
- The contributions of volunteers.

CES programs employ the following steps in program implementation:

- Building coalitions and strengthening partnerships at all levels of the System.
- Conducting needs assessments.
- Establishing and strengthening research bases.
- Developing, adopting, and conducting a variety of educational programs.
- Securing resources.
- Using efficient and comprehensive methodologies, including new technology.
- Training staff and volunteers.
- Assessing impact.
- Marketing programs.

## NDH Mission and Vision

The importance of educating consumers about nutrition, diet, and health choices is reflected in the Nutrition, Diet and Health Mission (see box). The mission reflects concern about a number of worldwide nutrition and health issues. The Nutrition, Diet and Health Vision expresses the empowerment outcome for which Extension educators are working: consumers who possess the ability to address and resolve these issues effectively (see box, p. 4).

## Addressing the Issues

National concern about nutrition, diet, and human health and the relationships among them has reached an all-time high. Of the 10 leading causes of death due to disease, five are associated with diet: coronary heart disease, several types of cancer, stroke, diabetes mellitus, and atherosclerosis. Obesity, a risk factor in all leading causes of death, affects 30 percent of women, 15 percent of men, and 25 percent of adolescents, with the highest rates observed among low-income and minority groups. Health objectives that relate specifically to improving nutrition and health are among national goals for the 21st century as expressed in *Healthy People 2000: National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives*.

*Food safety and quality.* The reported incidence of foodborne illness from pathogenic bacteria is increasing. Some of the factors contributing to increased vulnerability among the U.S. population include changing patterns of food consumption; an increasing proportion of elderly individuals and persons with chronic illnesses; and wide variations in food handling and preparation practices. Food safety and quality concerns often put various groups within society in conflict. Consumers' misgivings about the ability of the regulatory system to protect their health are increasing the need for food safety education and for communication about risk management.

*Health considerations in agricultural food production, processing, and distribution.* The economic success of the food industry, the sustainability of the food system, and the nutritional quality and

### **Nutrition, Diet and Health Mission**

*Through education, the Nutrition, Diet and Health Program empowers individuals, families, and communities, including policymakers, to make informed choices about food and lifestyles that support their physiological health and economic and social well-being.*



***Nutrition, Diet and  
Health Vision***

*The people of the United States will address and resolve individual, family, community, and national food and health issues.*

safety of food are increasingly intertwined. All participants in the food system, from producer to consumer, make decisions that affect the food supply. These decisions reflect changing consumer needs; technological advances in food production, processing, and distribution; and research findings related to food, nutrition, and health. Education is essential to promote responsiveness to consumer health needs throughout the agricultural system.

*Hunger.* In the United States, a significant proportion of people continue to suffer from poverty and hunger. An estimated 35.7 million Americans are in poverty, and many lack food in sufficient quantity and quality for adequate nutrition.

The global conditions (e.g., overpopulation) that create hunger and that jeopardize the global food supply are well known. However, the relationships among the issues that create community hunger and jeopardize community food supplies are often not well understood.

Many public policy experts no longer view the need to eliminate hunger as simply a moral issue or as one of compassion for others. Rather, hunger is increasingly perceived as a public issue involving millions of children who may carry the consequences of early deprivation into adulthood. Significant numbers of adults may be unemployed or underemployed as the work force requires more skilled and educated workers. By compromising children's powers of concentration at school, hunger can reduce their intellectual and academic achievements and thereby jeopardize their vocational futures as well.

*At-risk families.* According to the 1990 U.S. decennial census, 14.2 percent of persons in the United States live at or below the poverty level, and this percentage is increasing. Recent demographic changes in U.S. families include increased numbers of mothers of young children in the labor force, single-parent households, homeless families with children, and high school drop-outs.

The average age of the U.S. population is also rising. The proportion of adults over the age of 65 is the largest-growing segment of the U.S. population. Although elderly persons as a group

enjoy increased financial security, poverty rates among elderly women, as well as among children, are increasing.

These groups are at increased risk for problems related to nutrition, diet, and health. A disproportionate burden of diet-related disease is borne by minority, low-income, and educationally disadvantaged persons. Such populations have higher rates of high blood pressure, stroke, and diabetes mellitus than the general population. Most of these diseases also occur more frequently with advancing age.

*Consumer and public policy concerns.* Recent studies confirm the observation that Americans are concerned about nutrition, diet, and health—a concern that tends to increase with age. Consumers want safe, inexpensive, good-tasting, nutritious food that is convenient to store and prepare.

Manufacturers place thousands of new products on the market each year. Many new products contain reduced cholesterol, fat, calories, sugar, and sodium, or are enriched in fiber and nutrients such as calcium or vitamins. Such innovations, many of which are welcome, nevertheless involve increasingly complex choices and make consumers uncertain about how best to choose a healthful diet.

Public policy can help consumers make informed food-purchasing decisions in a variety of ways. Extension educators can help consumers understand the new food label and use it to evaluate the healthfulness of food. Because of their extensive contact with the public, Extension professionals also can shape future public policy by providing valuable input for new food regulations based on consumer use and acceptance of existing labeling. The federal government has recognized the need for additional improvements in food-labeling regulations by the year 2000, and Extension educators are expected to provide important input into these regulations.

The Cooperative Extension System is uniquely positioned to enhance society's capacity to address these and other critical issues in nutrition, diet, and health through education. It is with this belief that *Shaping Our Future* has been developed.

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*A disproportionate burden of diet-related disease is borne by minority, low-income, and educationally disadvantaged persons.*

## Nutrition, Diet and Health Goals

The goals of the Nutrition, Diet and Health Program are listed below.

1. Every child and adult will have continuous access to a safe and adequate food supply.
2. People will engage in lifestyle practices that promote health.
3. Communities will manage their resources to promote nutrition and health.
4. The agricultural food production, processing, and distribution system will be responsive to the health needs of the population.
5. Nutrition, diet, and health issues will be research and education priorities.

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*Recent studies confirm the observation that Americans are concerned about nutrition, diet, and health.*



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## Realizing the Vision

The Nutrition, Diet and Health Strategic Plan includes five goals. These goals, along with objectives, situation summaries, and action plans, are listed in the following section.

***Goal 1:** Every child and adult will have continuous access to a safe and adequate food supply.*

### Objectives

The people of the United States will:

- Be informed participants in resolving public policy issues concerned with food security and food safety.
- Exert a positive influence on the variety, availability, accessibility, affordability, and safety of the food supply in their communities.
- Adopt safe and healthful food selection, preparation, and handling practices.
- Utilize a variety of resources (including food assistance programs) to make safe, nutritious, and economical food choices.

### Current Situation

Hunger and food security are national issues. The food and nutritional needs of economically disadvantaged youth and families with young children have been successfully addressed through Extension programs, especially through the educational initiatives of 1890 institutions and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). Thus, Extension is in a favorable position to build on its existing educational structure and community networks to promote access to a safe and adequate food supply for every child and adult. Accordingly, the Cooperative Extension System has adopted a public issues education agenda and recommends that each Base Program feature a public issues component to engage citizens in active learning and problem solving.

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*CES recommends that each Base Program feature a public issues component.*

## Action Plan

Extension will:

1. Expand programs that target limited-resource, high-risk families and youth.
2. With consideration of the diversity of the population, train professionals, paraprofessionals, and volunteers in food selection, preparation, handling, and safety as well as in health-risk assessment procedures.
3. Develop and implement food security programs for agricultural food producers, public policymakers, and the general public to broaden the concept of the food supply to include sustained accessibility—with special attention to local products.
4. Create and/or collaborate with local, state, and national coalitions (including food assistance providers, policymakers, health professionals, and representatives of the agriculture industry and consumer advocacy groups) to develop strategies to ensure community access to a safe and adequate food supply.
5. Provide Extension workers with professional development opportunities in public issues education.

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*Extension can build on its existing educational structure and community networks to promote food access.*

*Goal 2: People will engage in lifestyle practices that promote health.*

## Objectives

The people of the United States will:

- Use the *U.S. Dietary Guidelines* and the *Food Guide Pyramid* to choose a healthful diet.
- Integrate physical exercise into daily life.
- Adopt safe food selection, preparation, service, and storage practices.
- Practice personal health protection (e.g., immunization, breast self-examination, regular physical check-ups, cholesterol screening, sanitation, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, and prevention or cessation of smoking and substance abuse).

- Adopt dietary practices recommended for specific life-cycle stages.

## Current Situation

Educational programs that promote healthful lifestyles, particularly among vulnerable, at-risk youth and adults, have long been fundamental components of nutrition, diet, and health programs provided by both 1862 and 1890 institutions. For example, EFNEP has specifically served low-income youth and families since 1968.

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*Several National Initiatives actively promote healthful lifestyles.*

Several Extension Service National Initiatives also actively promote healthful lifestyles. The Food Safety and Quality National Initiative, implemented in 1991, helps ensure the safety and quality of the food supply. The following year, the Plight of Young Children National Initiative was implemented to ensure a healthy start for all children. Since its inception in 1992, the Decisions for Health National Initiative has included a goal devoted to individual lifestyles and health. However, much remains to be done.

## Action Plan

Extension will:

1. Collaborate in the design and implementation of community-based, applied research that helps people use knowledge to improve their personal health behaviors.
2. Develop and refine a system for sharing successful educational programs.
3. Collaborate with the communications media to deliver sound nutrition, diet, and health messages.
4. Emphasize the importance of physical exercise in interdisciplinary nutrition and health education programs.
5. Form coalitions and partnerships with the food industry, food service systems, and the health care system to increase the impact of educational programs.



6. Influence research and public policy to address the needs of vulnerable high-risk groups, fully recognizing their diverse needs.

7. Pilot test, refine, and adopt the outcome indicators of the standardized *U.S. Dietary Guidelines*.

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*Public issues education in community resource management can improve nutrition, diet, and health for all.*

**Goal 3:** *Communities will manage their resources to promote nutrition and health.*

### **Objectives**

The people of the United States will:

- Participate in the assessment of food, nutrition, and health needs in their communities.
- Identify resources with which to address local conditions that affect health and well-being.

### **Current Situation**

Raising awareness of the role Extension can play in community decisionmaking is a priority component of both the Plight of Young Children and Decisions for Health National Initiatives. Broad community concerns, including those of nutrition and health, have been addressed in the Food Safety and Quality and the Youth at Risk National Initiatives. Public issues education in community resource management can improve nutrition, diet, and health for all.

### **Action Plan**

Extension will:

1. Develop coalitions, networks, and other types of collaborative arrangements to create and sustain support systems and educational programs that promote sound nutrition, good diets, and health. Participants should include service recipients, educators, service providers, and business and community leaders as well as representatives of the health insurance industry, foun-

dations, service organizations, transportation systems, and the agriculture and health care communities.

2. Develop leadership skills among professionals, paraprofessionals, and volunteers as well as participatory skills among citizens for planning and implementing community needs assessments, building coalitions, and shaping public policy.
3. Recognizing the diverse needs of the general public, train professionals, paraprofessionals, and community leaders in decisionmaking related to health practices, including food selection, preparation, handling, and safety.
4. Develop and conduct an impact assessment of coalition effectiveness.

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*The formation of partnerships and coalitions needs to be a systemwide priority.*

**Goal 4:** *The agricultural food production, processing, and distribution system will be responsive to the health needs of the population.*

## Objectives

Collaborators, professionals, and other participants in Extension programs will:

- Engage in dialogue about food, agricultural, and health issues that are important to communities.
- Promote leadership roles in creating an agricultural food production, processing, and distribution system that is responsive to the population's health needs.

## Current Situation

Partnerships and coalitions representing various perspectives are critical to building an agricultural food production, processing, and distribution system that is responsive to the health needs of the population. Currently, Extension professionals across the nation are emphasizing the need to communicate the health needs of the population to representatives of the agricultural system. The formation of partnerships and coalitions with a wide variety of interested parties needs to be a priority throughout the Cooperative Extension System.



## Action Plan

Extension will:

1. Form partnerships and coalitions (both internal and external to Extension) to develop strategies to ensure the sustainability of a healthful and safe food supply. Partners should include educators, legislators, and the communications media as well as representatives of agriculture, agribusiness, the health professions, and environmental, rural development, and consumer groups.
2. Build consensus within the academic community on the interface of health issues and agricultural food production, processing, and distribution methods.
3. Promote increased communication among consumer groups and the food industry to improve mutual understanding of product development.
4. Provide staff development activities that strengthen conflict resolution skills in addition to subject-matter expertise.
5. In cooperation with the health sciences, promote research in the areas of basic nutrition, food product development, and food safety as related to agricultural food production, processing, and distribution.
6. Develop and conduct impact assessments of coalition effectiveness.

*Goal 5: Nutrition and health issues will be research and education priorities.*

## Objectives

The people of the United States will:

- Understand the importance of research findings, including those related to biotechnology, for their daily lives.
- Participate in identifying and prioritizing their own nutrition, diet, and health research and education needs.
- Apply research findings to their behaviors at all stages of the life cycle.

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*Many consumers are uncertain about how best to interpret and use research findings in their daily lives.*

## Current Situation

Many consumers, including members of the health care community, are confused by the plethora of nutrition, diet, and health claims reported in the communications media. Similarly, many consumers are skeptical about new research information, lack understanding of how research evolves, and are uncertain about how best to interpret and use research findings in their daily lives.

Extension educators obtain important nutrition and health research information by working closely with the USDA Cooperative State Research Service and the state agricultural experiment stations operated through the land-grant university system. CES also collaborates with the Children's Nutrition Research Center in the College of Medicine at Baylor University. Extension faculty are working with state departments of education, particularly with state Nutrition Education and Training (NET) coordinators, to improve the quality and quantity of nutrition education provided from kindergarten through grade 12. To achieve this goal, Extension must expand research and education activities such as these and must commit additional resources to support them.

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*Extension educators obtain important information by working closely with research agencies and institutions.*

## Action Plan

Extension will:

1. In partnership with the research community, conduct and promote community-based, applied research that focuses on healthful lifestyle practices.
2. Collaborate with state departments of education (including NET) to ensure that all children have access to information about healthful lifestyles.
3. Collaborate with other agencies, institutions, and organizations to provide nutrition and food safety education, particularly for vulnerable populations.
4. Develop and refine a system for identifying, reviewing, and sharing effective educational programs.

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## Implementation of the Strategic Plan

The effective implementation of the Nutrition, Diet and Health Strategic Plan will require attention to a number of factors associated with program success, including:

- *Program accountability*—setting priorities, designing accountability models, and evaluating programs.
- *Enhanced communication*—articulating federal, state, and county contributions to desired outcomes; influencing family-focused program decisions in line with the plan; coordinating with (and as appropriate, integrating with) other CES Base Programs, National Initiatives, and priorities; and engaging in interdisciplinary collaborations, both internal and external.
- *Active partnerships*—networking, with emphasis on enhancing contacts through electronic technology and increasing collaboration and cooperation, especially with external public and private entities.
- *Strategic funding*—reallocating existing dollars as necessary, as well as acquiring new resources.

Highly visible effort is needed to implement this plan effectively. Words alone will not do it; action will. This means mobilizing key players at every level in CES to generate significant commitment to the use of the plan as the primary guide for program direction. It also means initiating concerted action to implement the plan throughout the Cooperative Extension System.

### Activities

Implementation plans include:

1. A national meeting—a major kick-off event—for CES Nutrition, Diet and Health teams. The meeting will provide a setting in which to:
  - a. Create a common understanding of the purpose, direction, and program content of the Nutrition, Diet and Health Strategic Plan.

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*Concerted action is necessary to implement the plan throughout the Cooperative Extension System.*



- b. Reach agreement on a process and timetable for developing state and/or regional plans for implementation.
  - c. Develop a process for identifying issues for consideration as National Initiatives by the Program Leadership Committee and the Strategic Planning Council of the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, as well as for moving some National Initiatives back into Base Programs.
  - d. Introduce a conceptual framework and planning process to meet the program-outcome assessment and reporting requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993.
2. Annual identification of exemplary programs, based on criteria to be determined by task forces composed of CES personnel and representatives of collaborating organizations. These programs will be featured in both promotional and internal information-sharing activities.
3. Annual assessments of implementation progress, along with action recommendations, by a review panel.

Through the implementation of this strategic plan, the Nutrition, Diet and Health Program will address major challenges on national and international fronts. The program will advance as Extension administrators and educators dedicate their efforts to the successful implementation of the plan.

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*The CES Nutrition, Diet and Health Program will advance as participants dedicate their efforts to the successful implementation of the plan.*





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